

Committee: Public Health Committee

Issue: Opposition of HB 5537, Section 6

Date: March 12, 2014

The following testimony is provided in opposition to House Bill 5537, section 6. This bill would expand the scope of practice of Speech Language Pathologists (SLP's) to include provision of Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) within Connecticut.

We are three Connecticut SLP's licensed by the Department of Public Health, who provide services to children with autism. We have each enrolled in graduate training programs with coursework concentrating in Applied Behavior Analysis. One of us is a doctoral level speech language pathologist and a doctoral level Board Certified Behavior Analyst (BCBA-D). Because Speech Language Pathologists are not required to take any classes in ABA, nor do they have any training or experiences requirements related to the provision of behavior analytic services as part of their training, we have each pursued this additional training outside of our SLP coursework.

Since the ground-breaking research of Ivar Lovaas was published in 1987, applied behavior analysis (ABA) has become synonymous with providing effective evidenced-based treatment to individuals with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). ABA is now the nationally recognized leading treatment for individuals with ASD and has been validated by hundreds of peer reviewed journal articles. Behavior analysis has also been recognized by a variety of regulatory bodies and well-respected individuals (The National Research Council, 2001, The Maine Administrators of Services for Children with Disabilities, 2000, The New York State Department of Health – Clinical Practice Guidelines, 1999, The U.S. Surgeon General's Report, 1994.) Since 1998, the Behavior Analyst Certification Board (BACB) has been the single governing body for professionals working in the field of applied behavior analysis. Under certification, the field has thrived resulting in increased numbers of BACB certificants and the creation of new graduate training programs with coursework concentrations in applied behavior analysis (ABA). Behavior analysis and the scope of practice of Behavior Analysts has been defined by existing CT legislation.

Behavior Analysts work with some of the most vulnerable and disabled populations with autism in the state. ABA is not currently within the scope of practice of Speech Language Pathologists, and it is worth noting that the great majority of licensed Speech Language Pathologists would not meet the minimum course requirements or supervision standards for approval to sit for the Behavior Analysts Certification Board examination. The American Speech Language Association's (ASHA) Journal, Language Speech and Hearing Services in the Schools, 2008 survey revealed that "current (SLP) professionals have an unbalanced understanding of autism and have some insecurities regarding their abilities to provide effective services to these students...the results of the survey suggest additional preparation is needed to better prepare SLP's to provide services to autism." Further, a presentation at the 2013 ASHA conference (Gerenser & Koenig, 2013) discussed the lack of knowledge of autism and behavioral interventions (88% of respondents had not received any coursework in the area), and concluded that "SLPs will need to understand and respect the ABA framework." Finally, the "Knowledge and Skills Acquisition" standards that are defined by ASHA's Council for Clinical Certification does not provide a requirement for students to take a course in autism or in functional behavior assessment.

Expansion of an SLP's scope of practice would negatively impact consumers of ABA services. Further, any proposed expansion of an SLP's scope of practice must first be reviewed in accordance with Public Act 11-209, An Act Concerning the Department of Health's Oversight Responsibilities Relating to Scope of Practice Determinations for Health Care Professionals.

Please oppose HB 5537, to ensure that the citizens with autism of the State of Connecticut receive the consumer protections they require to guarantee access to effective treatment.

Kathleen Dyer, Ph.D., CCC-SLP, BCBA-D  
Denise Emma, MA, CCC-SLP  
Maegan Kiger, MS, CCC-SLP